

Keynote

Director Branham, Department representatives, and Academy staff, I've suffered for this Keynote... now it's your turn.

Welcome and congratulations to the class of 2006-09! I would also like to welcome and congratulate your spouses, parents, family and friends. Each of you deserves special recognition for supporting this remarkable group of people, and the cadets will need your continued support. As one of the many instructors that worked with this fine group of cadets, I enjoyed working with them, and I was very impressed. I appreciated your thirst for knowledge, your hard work and dedication and your genuine concern for each other. These qualities will serve you well in your career and throughout your lives.

I would also like to congratulate the Academy staff for another outstanding job of preparing these men and women for their careers with our Department and the work that lies ahead.

Today I'd like to talk about heroes, because it seems to me that this country has its priorities way out of whack. Sports stars and entertainers are NOT heroes. Being able to slam dunk or sing does not make you a hero. The definition of hero is:

a remarkably brave person: somebody who commits an act of

remarkable bravery or who has shown an admirable quality
such as great courage or strength of character.

Sound like anybody in this room?

Pat Tillman was a hero. When his brother was playing ASU baseball, Pat would sit in the same section as me and my wife. All of the ladies, from the little girls to the grandmothers, including my wife, would slobber over him and hug him, and Pat was gracious to them all. He gave up all of that, and millions of dollars, to defend his country. Pat Tillman was a hero. By the way, did you know that, before he came to ASU, Pat Tillman had a juvenile record??

The firefighters and police officers who ran IN TO the twin towers when everyone else was running OUT are heroes. The people on Flight 93 who made sure the plane crashed into an empty field and not into a crowded building are heroes.

The people who are battling horrible diseases, and who still manage to get up every day showing tremendous strength, courage, dignity and grace, are heroes.

Teachers are heroes. Anyone who thinks otherwise needs to substitute teach for a day. Other people who help children are heroes. Yes, that also makes our new YCOs heroes.

The children are our future and they have **unlimited** potential. Believe it or not, one of the youth in our care, with proper guidance, can grow up to be the person who cures cancer. And we **really** need a cure for cancer.

I have a friend who has an 11 year old son who is an absolute genius. But that also means he is easily bored and he therefore has the attention span of a **gnat**. Lucky for him, he has 2 loving parents who have the time and money to put him in the best schools and to get the best services for him. If he didn't have those parents and opportunities, he could be one of those kids who ends up addicted to Meth, at Adobe, and on the front page of the Arizona Republic.

There is a quote from Goethe that the cadets hear in Agency Orientation, and it can be summarized as follows:

If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.

It dawned on me; I had read a book that was a great example of this.

In the Redwall books, all of the **good** guys are mice, rabbits, squirrels and gophers, and all of the **evil** guys are rats, weasels, ferrets and crows. It just goes without saying—if you are a rat, you are evil.

In Outcast of Redwall, a mouse finds an orphaned baby ferret and she decides to adopt him. The others around her try to talk her out of it, saying the baby is a ferret and he therefore will be evil. The mouse insists that the ferret will be a good person, and she raises the ferret as her son. As the ferret is growing up, he makes a few bad choices. The ferret is then blamed for **everything** that goes wrong, and all he **ever hears** is that he is no good and he is going to be evil. Well, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and the ferret runs away to join a gang of bad guys.

At the end of the book, the good guys and bad guys have a battle. The gangleader shoots an arrow at the mouse mother, and the ferret steps in front of her and dies, taking the arrow instead of his mother. Afterwards, all of the other good guys are telling the mouse mother that **she was right, that there actually was good in the ferret after all**. Surprisingly, she says, "I actually think he **tripped** in front of me."

The author was asked in an interview: **did** the ferret fall or did he **intentionally** take the arrow? The author said, "That's for **you** to decide." There was **NEVER** any doubt in my mind that the ferret died protecting his mother, because **that is what good people do**. That is what **heroes** do.

There will be several times in your life, moments of truth, when you

will have to choose whether to do the right thing, which is frequently **not** the easiest path. Choose your path **wisely**.

The last example I have is from To Kill a Mockingbird. If you haven't read the book or seen the movie lately, please do so. The first thing to note is that the hero is Atticus Finch, who is the greatest lawyer in American literature. If anyone ever asks a lawyer why they became a lawyer, it is enough to say "**Atticus Finch**."

You may recall that the story is set in the old South, and Atticus is representing a Black man accused of assaulting a White woman. The man is innocent, but that does not matter to the angry crowd, and the crowd decides to lynch the defendant before the trial. Atticus knows the sheriff is not around to stop the crowd, so Atticus sits outside the jailhouse alone, and he tells the angry mob that he will **not** let them lynch the defendant.

I remembered that Atticus was a hero in the lynch scene, but I had not realized there was **another** hero. Atticus' children show up. The daughter is too young to realize what is happening, but the 10 year old son figures out **exactly** what is happening. The son puts himself **between** the angry mob and his father. Atticus tells his son to go home, but the son refuses. The son understands that, **if the son leaves**, the angry mob might **kill** his father, and the son puts himself in

harm's way to **protect** his father.

I was blown away by this—where did the son learn his values? **By watching his father, of course.** He could not have had a **better** role model than Atticus Finch.

Always remember that you are working with children, and that they are **watching** you as role models. One of the best bits of advice I ever got was when a boss told me, “Charlie, the lawyer should always be the calmest person in the room.” That advice is **also** great advice for **ANY** adult working with children—you should always be the **calmest** person in the room.

My last observation is also from To Kill a Mockingbird. Earlier in the story, the daughter asks the neighbor why **everyone** in town is **mad** at her father. The neighbor says:

There are people put on this Earth to do the jobs no one else wants to do—and your father is one of them.

That statement also applies to **you**, our new YCOs. You are beginning a difficult job. You are going to be working with children who will know how to push **all your buttons**, and they're going to be pushing them all the time. **Never forget** that they are children, and that they are watching you. **Never forget** that they have unlimited

potential. **Never forget** that you have the **power** to help **mold** them into productive citizens.

Never forget that you are a hero. Welcome to Juvenile Corrections, and best of luck with your careers!